



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Two Brothers Survive Massive Avalanche in Ophir Backcountry

**Contact: San Miguel County Undersheriff Eric Berg 970-728-1911
or Reserve Public Information Officer Susan Lilly 970-369-8622**

November 25, 2015 -- (Ophir, CO) – A major avalanche on a popular ski route in the Ophir backcountry triggered a multi-agency search and rescue effort led by the San Miguel County Sheriff's Office when one of two skiers was missing and presumed dead.

Two brothers from Ophir were skiing from Trout Lake to Ophir and were on top of the Fatwa area near Waterfall Canyon in Ophir when one of the brothers, Brian Holmes, 26 of Ophir started his descent, which triggered an avalanche. The other brother, Alex Holmes 27, also of Ophir, saw the massive slide sweep his brother out of site. Alex told Sheriff's Deputies that when he initially tried to ski down to search for his brother, he triggered a second avalanche and didn't feel it was safe to continue, so he skied back to Trout Lake to call for help.

Sheriff's Deputies were dispatched just after 1pm Wednesday and staged in the Town of Ophir, paged Search and Rescue volunteer personnel, launched an Olathe Spray helicopter and activated Telluride Ski Patrollers with a trained avalanche dog, who were eventually stood down before being dispatched to the scene.

During the ongoing mission, dispatchers reported that they received calls from a cellphone belonging to Brian Holmes coming from the area of the slide. Dispatchers said they heard someone breathing, but no further communication was established.

Brian Holmes said he was able to self-extricate after being carried an estimated 1,000 feet down the slide, ultimately landing on his back, mostly buried in snow, with only his face and one arm exposed. He said it took him 10 – 15 minutes to self-extricate, and he then began searching for his brother, whom he thought was dead. After nearly an hour of searching and trying to reach 911, he made his way down to the Town of Ophir, reaching on scene Deputies at about 2pm.

Additional resources were "stood-down," and Telluride EMS was dispatched. The patient was taken to the Telluride Medical Center for further assessment and treated for what appeared to be non-life threatening injuries.

Sheriff's Deputy Todd Rector who led the operation said given the recent wind and worsening conditions, it is not surprising an avalanche was triggered. "The San Juans in general can represent some of the most tenuous snow conditions on the continent. Given the circumstances and nature of the slide, this skier is extremely fortunate."

The San Miguel Sheriff's Office, located in Telluride, Colorado and established in 1883, serves 7,800 residents and countless visitors across the 1,288 square miles of San Miguel County. Sheriff Bill Masters has been serving as the county's elected Sheriff since 1980.

###